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FM AMEMBASSY CHISINAU
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 8267
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 CHISINAU 000623

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/UMB

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/03/2019

TAGS: PGOV PHUM PREL KDEM MD

SUBJECT: OPPOSITION WORKING TO FORM RULING
COALITION

REF A: Chisinau 595

Classified by: Ambassador Asif J. Chaudhry for
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

REF A: Chisinau 595; REF B: Chisinau 614

¶1. (C) Summary: In the first full week since the July 29 elections, the four non-communist party leaders have met almost daily to work on reaching a coalition agreement. Though they immediately agreed in principle on the need to work together, one week later they were still hashing out the details of who will serve in which position. On August 7, we heard that at the previous day's meeting the group had started to reach a broad understanding, most likely to nominate Filat for Speaker and Lupu for President, letting the Liberal Party suggest the person of their choice as Prime Minister. Meanwhile, the Party of Communists (PCRM) Central Committee was scheduled to meet on August 7 in order to determine their course of action. We have heard that they might designate eight PCRM members to vote for the opposition Presidential candidate, possibly allowing a new government to be formed without delay, and without requiring repeat elections in ¶2010.

¶2. (C) During this week following the elections, the Ambassador met separately with each of the non-Communist party leaders in order to discuss their plans to assume leadership in Moldova. He has similarly met with President Voronin for the PCRM view (REF B), and Deputy Prime Minister Dodon to hear from the GOM. End Summary.

Opposition Agrees on Coalition, Working on Details

¶3. (C) In a July 31 meeting with the Ambassador, Liberal Party leaders Mihai Ghimpu and Dorin Chirtoaca confirmed that the four non-Communist party leaders (Filat, Ghimpu, Lupu and Urechean) had their first group meeting on July 31 at 1:00 P.M., and come to an agreement on setting up a coalition. The four had started discussions, but had not yet come to any final agreements on how the coalition would work. They had agreed to keep coalition negotiations quiet and not make any public announcements until after the details had been ironed out. Ghimpu said that they had agreed that the four leaders would make all decisions on an equal basis, and that no one of them would function as a chairman. Ghimpu said that the group had discussed their various options, and had agreed that each would try to see if there were any votes they could win from the Communists.

They also agreed to check the Constitution and study the terms of the laws that governed the upcoming events. As the details of the coalition agreement could not be finalized at that meeting, the four had agreed to meet again on August 2.

¶4. (C) On the morning of August 3, Democratic Party leader Marian Lupu told the Ambassador that the group of four party leaders had met a second time August 2, and still failed to come to an agreement on the specifics. A big part of their second meeting centered on the principles of the coalition, he said, but a lot of time was wasted on arguing about the electoral results, trying to determine which party had taken away the other party's votes. It was evident that there was broad agreement on the need to work together, but that there were still significant disagreements within the group. The group had agreed to meet again on August 3, as they were hoping to iron out the remaining issues and be able to go public soon.

Group Agrees on Principles but not yet on Positions

¶5. (C) According to Lupu, it was clear by the end of the August 2 meeting, that any general agreement on principles would have to be made more concrete by coming to an agreement on positions.

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Although Filat and Lupu were already in competition for the Speaker position, Lupu said it was obvious that Ghimpu also wanted to be Speaker. Filat told the Ambassador that he would absolutely not agree to have Ghimpu as Speaker. Additionally, Filat thought that Ghimpu was becoming a problem for the group, hindering their ability to come to specific agreement on positions. By the end of the week however, both Lupu and Urechean told us they had increased respect for Ghimpu for taking a principled stand and sticking to his principles.

¶6. (C) Lupu said (on Aug 3) that there was a consensus among the other three (Lupu, Urechean and Ghimpu) that Filat would be the best Prime Minister. Lupu noted, however, that Filat had not said anything to the group about whether he wanted this position. Filat had already told the Ambassador he does not want to be the Prime Minister, as the PM would be blamed for the intractable economic situation, and could be removed at will by the President. The Ambassador shared with Lupu Filat's opinion that the two (Filat and Lupu) should work together to support each other. Lupu then wondered what Ghimpu would get if Filat became Speaker (since no one viewed Ghimpu as a competent contender for the Prime Minister position). Lupu understood the need to cooperate with Filat because of their numerical weaknesses and the need to work together to win some PCRM support.

¶7. (C) Lupu suggested to the Ambassador a possible scenario in which the opposition would start out by electing him (Lupu) as Speaker and Filat as Deputy Speaker. That would allow Lupu to chair the legislature during the critical presidential elections, and if Lupu succeeded in becoming President, Filat would become the Speaker. Lupu acknowledged that the group of four was shaky and could fall apart, but whoever was Speaker would

have that position locked in. Filat did not agree with that scenario, and wanted to be elected directly as Speaker himself. There was clearly distrust between Lupu and Filat over this question. When Filat called a press conference on August 5, Lupu feared Filat intended to go public on this question (but Filat did not).

¶18. (C) Urechean told the Ambassador on August 4 that the biggest problem within the Group of Four was personal egos, particularly competition between Filat and Lupu, as both wanted to be Speaker of Parliament and President of the country. Urechean thought that it might be better to elect Lupu as Speaker first, as it would be harder for Filat to win the over the eight PCRM votes needed to elect the President. Although Urechean indicated his willingness to serve in any of the three key posts, he also said that for the sake of reconciliation between the two bigger egos (Filat and Lupu), he personally was willing to step aside and forego the key posts.

The Four have Doubts about Each Other

¶19. (C) Although the four party leaders clearly understand the need to work together in order to establish a non-Communist government in Moldova, it is evident that the four started out with a level of mistrust and doubt that they needed to overcome. Filat said he had doubts about Lupu, and was still trying to figure out if he was sincere. Meanwhile Lupu also expressed his own doubts about Filat, telling the Ambassador that the fact that Filat had not said openly that he wanted to be Speaker created some doubts in his mind that Filat might be negotiating with the Communists. Filat also noted his concerns about working with Ghimpu.

¶10. (C) Both Ghimpu and Lupu suggested that one weak point of the coalition might be Dumitru Diacov, former head of the Democratic Party (who had stepped aside to offer the leadership position to Lupu). Ghimpu noted that the opposition's biggest weakness was the narrowness of their majority, which could easily be destroyed if

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Diacov were to defect to the PCRM and take 3 MPs with him.

¶11. (C) Lupu was painfully aware of the fact that the PCRM could destroy the opposition parliamentary majority of 53 (out of 101), by winning 4 votes away from the coalition to add to the Communists' 48 seats. After some initial doubts about Diacov, Lupu said on August 3 that he had become more confident about his own party's ability to stand together and resist any Communist pressures. There were two members of the party he had initially doubted, but after talking to them, Lupu said he now feels more confident about their solidarity.

¶12. (C) Although the Group of Four was plagued by doubts and competition during their first week of negotiations, on August 7 Filat told the Ambassador that they were now moving in the right direction. For the first time in several meetings, he now seemed to be in an optimistic mood. Lupu too, said on August 7 that things were going much better and that the group was nearing the end of their negotiations. He said that the group would meet again in the evening of August 7

at 8:00 P.M., and hopefully finalize their coalition plan.

Clock Ticking; Agreements Needed to Move Forward

¶13. (C) On August 6, as required by law, the Central Election Committee submitted to the Constitutional Court the official results on the outcome of the parliamentary elections for the court to confirm the results and validate the MP mandates. According to Article 89 of the Electoral Code, the Constitutional Court then has a period of up to ten days to confirm the lawfulness of the elections and validate the list of MPs. The Constitutional Court has set August 14 as the date for their meeting. Once the results are confirmed and the mandates validated, then the parliament may convene at any point, but must convene within thirty days of the elections, i.e. by August 28.

¶14. (C) We can thus expect the Parliament's opening session at some point during the period from August 17-28, with election of the Speaker likely to happen on the first day, and the parliamentary vote on the President soon afterwards. (After the Parliamentary Committee for Election of a President is named and nominations made, there is a five-day period, and then a session where the candidates speak before the voting takes place.) The four non-Communist party leaders have already told us that after the speaker is elected (and most likely before the presidential election) they will carry out a series of personnel changes, removing the Prosecutor General, head of Teleradio Moldova, Security Services and other key positions.

Communists May Concede Control

¶15. (C) A meeting of the Central Committee of the Party of Communists has been called for August 7 to discuss PCRM options and determine its strategy. Deputy Prime Minister Dodon told the Ambassador that this meeting would discuss a plan for the PCRM to delegate eight deputies to vote for the presidential candidate nominated by the four-party coalition and cede control to the other side. This would put the parties that were formerly in opposition in charge of leading the country through the difficult period of economic crisis that lies ahead. The four leaders met August 6 with outgoing IMF Country Director Johann Mathieson to hear a sobering expert assessment of the true state of Moldova's economy.

Comment

¶16. (C) Although the four non-communist party leaders realize the necessity of working with each other to create a functioning coalition, at this

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point they still harbor some doubts about each other. There are competing egos, and conflicting desires to occupy the same positions. With the passage of time during this past week, they seem to be coming to a better working relationship and a better understanding of the fact that united they stand, divided they all fall. The Communists meanwhile, seem to have come to grips with the fact that they simply do not have the numbers to elect their own president. As the PCRM goes into

opposition, the Communists have two possible choices -- they could block the election of a president, and keep Moldova in electoral crisis until 2010 -- or by becoming "responsible opposition" and permitting the election of a president, they cede the responsibilities of guiding the country through economic crisis to the other side. Having already made their fortunes during eight years of power, they can afford to sit back, work on party development and allow the other parties to stumble through the challenges of confronting the tough economic issues.

CHAUDHRY